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SELF-CONTROL IN CURING INSANITY.

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THERE is no one whose mental development is such as to render him capable of being influenced by passion or guided by reason who has not at times felt himself impelled to the performance of acts which he knew to be wrong according to the standard of expedience or morality by which he had been accustomed to be governed. Should he have yielded to the emotional disturbance or the imperfect ideation of the moment, he has, when his feelings have been assuaged and reason has resumed its sway, become aware of the fact that he had during the whole period of his mental perturbation the power to modify his conduct or to refrain altogether from action, had he exerted his will to the requisite extent. How far this volitional control is normal or abnormal is a question extremely difficult of solution ; but there is no doubt that the will is one of the most uncultivated of all the mental faculties, and that it is capable of a degree of development far in excess of that which is commonly exhibited even by persons of marked intellectual ability.

If this is true of those who are ordinarily regarded as sane, it is equally true of most of those whom science has declared to be lunatics. Of course there is in some of the insane such a degree of structural disease of the brain as absolutely to destroy many of the more important of the mental faculties, the will among them. Such persons do not come within the scope of the present discussion.

But there are others in whom no such disorganization can be presumed to exist, and yet who, when left to themselves, to be guided by their own minds, exhibit the most unbridled passions, pursue the most absurd trains of thought, and perpetrate acts which are in direct violation of all the laws of God and man. In many cases it is impossible to determine which of these are sane and which insane. There is no infallible law which is applicable alike to both classes. Neurologists and alienists decide accord-

ing to their preconceived views, pronouncing some to be of normal mental organization and some of abnormal, but giving us no test for our guidance, and often differing among themselves in regard to some one particular instance. That many, if not a majority, of these mentally-depraved persons, whether sane or insane, are capable of regulating their feelings, their ideas, and their conduct by a standard more in accordance with that by which right-minded persons are guided is a matter in regard to which I do not believe a reasonable doubt exists.

If there is anything which has been taught to us by the most advanced stage of science as applied to the anatomy, the physiology, and the pathology of the brain, it is the fact that the utmost degree of mental aberration may exist without there being the slightest change perceptible to our senses in the normal structure of the central organ of the mind. Of course there is some alteration, such, for instance, as a pernicious education may effect, or such as may be induced by indulgence in ignoble emotions, degrading trains of thought, or vicious practices ; but it is so slight and perhaps so evanescent as to be entirely beyond the reach not only of our unaided senses, but of all the instruments of precision or of analytical processes that are at the present day at our disposal. The brain, therefore, of the most pronounced lunatic may not differ, so far as we can perceive, from that of one who during life had stood at the very summit of human mental development. At birth the two brains might have been identical, not only in all the elements that entered into their composition, but also in their tendencies and proclivities. One, however, started in the course of life under disadvantageous circumstances ; the other had everything in its favor. One was left to its own guidance and to the influence of circumstances detrimental to its well-being ; the other amid beneficial surroundings was carefully trained and developed. Would it be a matter of surprise if the possessor of the one should be an enemy of society and a perpetrator of acts of fraud and violence, and the other a leader in all honorable and virtuous purposes ?

But while all this is true, it is equally certain that the reprobate and villain is susceptible of being acted upon by sufficiently stringent motives ; of regulating his thoughts and conduct in accordance with a system foreign to that habitual with him, and of guiding himself through courses different from those to which he

has been accustomed. Otherwise the criminal should not be punished, no matter how inimical he may be to the welfare of the body politic, but is to be compassionated and tenderly cared for, and, at most, subjected to such restraint only as will suffice to protect society from his depredations. From this stand-point he is not to blame for a dissolute or infamous life, for he cannot help himself and is only following impulses for which he is not responsible. Efforts to reform him should not be undertaken; for why attempt to alter a mental constitution due to an abnormal brain, which is as much a part of his identity as is the color of his eyes or the contour of his face?

Undoubtedly he can be changed, and this change must necessarily be effected through an alteration in the cerebral organization from which his mind is evolved. He changes himself through the influence of motives stronger, for the time being at least, than those that originally governed him and rendered him wicked and depraved.

Many persons recognized by those familiar with the subject of mental alienation in all its phases to be insane are rendered so by yielding little by little to impulses which they know to be wrong, but which it is unpleasant or difficult to resist. Their will-power, undeveloped by proper education, becomes weaker with each act of yielding; whereas, if they had controlled themselves in the beginning, volitional strength, and not volitional debility, would have been the result. Principles not perhaps very deeply ingrafted in the first instance are cast aside; scruples arising from early education are disregarded, not without some difficulty in the beginning, for with such people, as with all others, *c'est le premier pas qui coute*. But finally a trifling emotion or a transient desire suffices, so that delusions become more or less fixed and impulses more or less powerful. Error in one or several directions, undistinguishable from truth, is established, and the will gives way without an effort at resistance. Acts of violence are committed from trifling motives; the plea of insanity is brought forward; and the perpetrator, if he does not entirely escape, suffers some light punishment, altogether inadequate to the gravity of his offence.

An instance in point is that of the lunatic who a few months since murdered one of the medical officers of the Flatbush Lunatic Asylum. The man Dougherty, as long ago as 1884, was employed

by a telegraph company at Scranton, Penn., though considered very much of a crank. He said he had invented the Dougherty motor, which he advertised and described as "a finite machine that will use the great, perpetual, unlimited, infinite power that moves, lights, and heats the universe. Planetary magnetism, the great divine law of attraction and repulsion, the principles upon which it is built, explained by the discoverer and inventor." Then he had some trouble, still being in the employment of the telegraph company, about his pay. He wrote to the president that, unless his money were forthcoming on a certain day, he would "demoralize things." The money did not arrive on the day named ; so he armed himself, barricaded the doors and windows of the office, cut the wires, and held full sway for three days. At the end of this time he was overpowered and arrested, but the case was soon settled, and in a few days he was allowed to go free.

But he went on from bad to worse. He imagined himself very much in love with a distinguished actress, wrote her many letters, crossed the ocean to visit her, travelled on the trains with her, presented her with an enormous bouquet, and made her a speech full of the most exaggerated sentiment. His attentions became so annoying that finally the lady reported the case to the police, and he was arrested in the lobby of a theatre in New York. When searched, a large loaded revolver was found on him, which he said he carried to protect himself from a "crew of devils" who, he declared, were trying to steal the lady's love from him. Not until then was he adjudged insane and dangerous, and committed to a lunatic asylum, from which, however, he soon escaped by fitting a key to a door. Two weeks afterwards he suddenly appeared in the superintendent's office and, pointing a pistol at the physician's head, demanded certain articles of clothing which he had left behind. The superintendent, although he was covered by the man's pistol the entire time, acted with great coolness and presence of mind, and, summoning an attendant, directed him to bring the articles asked for. Dougherty, after getting the bundle, made a bow and walked away.

Now, up to this time there seems to have been no serious idea entertained by any one that this man was insane. It is true that he was arrested and committed to an asylum as "insane and dangerous," but this was evidently only for the purpose of pro-

protecting a lady from annoyance and of getting rid of a troublesome fellow. Certainly the superintendent of the asylum in which he had been confined did not consider him a lunatic, although he entered that gentleman's office and pointed a pistol at his head. It was not until a few days subsequently, when he again visited the office with a pistol in each hand and, without the slightest provocation, killed the assistant superintendent, that the idea seems to have been definitely formed that he was a lunatic. He shot the physician twice, instantly killing him, and then coolly walked away. Doubtless he will suffer no inconvenience other than being again confined in a lunatic asylum, to be discharged when in the opinion of the authorities he has recovered his reason.*

I venture to assert, as the result of much experience with such people as Dougherty, and many conversations with them, that at all times during the manifestation of what in the beginning was mere eccentricity of conduct, all through his violent acts and his emotional disturbance down to the perpetration of an unprovoked murder, he might have controlled himself had he been so disposed, and, in my opinion, he ought to be executed in the manner provided by law for other criminals.

Many cases in illustration of this opinion have been reported by medical writers. Without further referring to them I will cite the following, which have occurred in my own experience :

Upon one occasion a young man consulted me for symptoms indicating cerebral congestion. He had pain in his head, dizziness, and was unable to sleep. He informed me that he had been for several months constantly troubled by a force, which was inexplicable to him, to kill a friend who was employed in the same office with him. Once he had gone so far as secretly to put strychnia into a mug of ale, which he had invited the young man to drink ; but just as the intended victim was raising the vessel to his lips my visitor had, as if by accident, knocked it out of his friend's hand. Every morning he awoke with the impulse so strong upon him that he felt certain he would carry it out before the day closed ; but he had always been able to overcome it. This young man reasoned perfectly well in regard to his impulse, and very candidly admitted, and I entirely agreed with him, that,

* Since this was written Dougherty has been tried, and, in consequence of insanity, was found guilty of a minor degree of murder, and sentenced to life imprisonment. Additional proceedings have, however, been instituted, and it is probable that even this comparatively light sentence will be set aside.

if he had yielded and committed the murder, he ought to have been punished to the full extent of the law.

Undoubtedly, if this person had been encouraged to the slightest extent by the idea that he could, by reason of insanity, perpetrate murder with impunity, he would have acted in accordance with his impulse. It was, as he informed me, the fear of the consequences that had restrained him; but, meeting with no sympathy from me, he obtained permanent mastery over himself and abandoned the idea altogether.

The following extract from a letter which I received several years ago is likewise to the point:

"In the New York *Sun* of the 30th inst. I noticed the proceedings of the Medico-Legal Society, in the College of Physicians and Surgeons, on emotional insanity, etc., and I was impressed particularly with your remarks on 'Morbid Impulse.' Some two weeks since I was at work in my garden with a spade, and one of my little girl children, just three years old, came in where I was, and I was suddenly seized with an impulse to kill the child with the spade that I was at work with, and in order to prevent my doing so I had to make her leave the garden. Now, I love this child better than I do the apple of my eye, and why I was seized with that impulse I can't say. Since that time I have been feeling strange, and I am afraid to trust myself with my own family, though I know perfectly well what I am doing, and only feel actuated by these impulses. I have consulted a physician, and he laughed at me. If you can suggest any remedy for these strange impulses, I will pay you what you charge, and will consider that you have done me a favor that will *cause me to bless your name forever*. I don't consider that I am in any danger of murdering any one just yet, but the idea of such a thing is horrible, and I fear it may grow on me unless remedied."

In my reply I called the writer's attention to the admitted fact that he had his impulse under control; that he was able to reason calmly and intelligently in regard to it; that he had applied to me for advice, and that I urged him to place himself without delay under the restraint of an asylum. I further told him that if he disregarded this advice, and finally yielded to his impulse, he would be fully as guilty of murder as if he had killed through deliberate malice, and that he ought to be just as surely executed as any other murderer.

In regard to certain lunatics Dr. Carpenter* says:

"Nothing else is requisite than that they should exercise an adequate amount of self-control; but the best-directed moral treatment cannot enforce this if the patient do not himself (or herself) coöperate. Much may be effected, however, as in the education of children, by presenting adequate *motives* to self-control; and the more frequently this is exerted, the more easy does the

* "Principles of Mental Physiology," London, 1874, p. 663.

exertion become. This form of insanity is particularly common among females of naturally 'quick temper,' who, by not placing an habitual restraint upon themselves, gradually cease to retain any command over it. The writer well remembers that, when going with Dr. Conolly through one of the wards on the female side of the Lunatic Asylum at Hanwell, Dr. C. remarked to him: 'It is my belief that two-thirds of the women here have come to require restraint through the habitual indulgence of an originally bad temper.'

And again :*

"There can be no doubt that many a man has been saved from an attack of insanity by the resolute determination of his will *not* to yield to his morbid tendencies. But if he should give way to these tendencies, and should dwell upon his morbid ideas, instead of endeavoring to escape from them, they come at last to acquire a complete mastery over him; and his will, his common-sense, and his moral sense at last succumb to their domination. . . . And so the judicious physician, in the treatment of an insane patient, whilst doing everything he can to invigorate the bodily health, to ward off sources of mental disturbance, and to divert the current of thought and feeling from a morbid into a healthful channel, will sedulously watch for every opportunity of fostering the power of self-control; will seek out the motives most likely to act upon the individual; will bring these into play upon every suitable occasion; will approve and reward its successful exercise; will sympathize with failure even when having recourse to the restraint which it has rendered necessary; will encourage every renewed exertion, and will thus give every aid he can to the reacquirement of that volitional direction which, as the bodily malady abates, is alone needed to prevent the recurrence of the disordered mental action."

That the insane are amenable to discipline every alienist knows. The whole system of management of our lunatic asylums is based upon this principle. The granting of indulgences for good conduct and the taking-away of privileges for infractions of the rules have an influence which many of the most violent of the insane distinctly feel and by which they are governed. Tell a lunatic who is in the habit of spreading his butter over the tablecloth that if he continues his disorderly conduct he shall have no more butter, and he will be very apt to desist. Whether his erroneous ideas should be combated by arguments addressed to his reason is a somewhat different matter. It has been said that it is useless to attempt to convince a lunatic that his erroneous notions are not true. Perhaps this is correct when serious structural lesions exist in the brain. The false intellectual conception is then a fixed result of the altered brain-tissue, and is just as direct a consequence of cerebral action as is a natural thought

from a healthy brain. Still, we know that in health it is sometimes possible by argument to counteract the most firmly-rooted ideas; it is, perhaps, yet easier to do this by the aid of certain of the pleasurable emotions. And there appears to be no reason why the like result may not occasionally be produced by arguments addressed to a person with an insane mind, and by bringing into action those feelings which spring from kindness. We know, in fact, that this end is at times accomplished, and that by never for one instant admitting the truth of an insane delusion, and at suitable times—not obtrusively, but when occasion offers—urging such arguments against it as would be convincing to persons of sound minds, the lunatic comes at last to see the falsity of his ideas, and to laugh at them himself. Little by little he loses faith in his perverted reason, and, though he may take up another delusion, the last is held with much less tenacity than the first.

A great deal of the insanity of the day is, as I have said in the beginning of these remarks, the result of defective education, by which a smattering of knowledge in regard to many things is acquired, while no thing is thoroughly learned. A feeling of vanity, therefore, which is inherent in all mankind, is developed to an inordinate degree, and every child is taught to regard himself as somebody when in fact he is nobody. I cannot close these remarks more appositely than by citing a paragraph from the *Philadelphia Times*, which appeared in a number of that paper during the summer of 1877, premising that what is said in regard to criminals is equally applicable to lunatics.

“What a terrible satire upon our boasted free-school system is conveyed in the word ‘educated.’ Nine-tenths of the young criminals sent to the penitentiary have enjoyed school advantages, but three-fourths of them have never learnt to do an honest stroke of work. Our children have their poor little brains crammed full of all kinds of impossible knowledge, of names and dates and numbers and unintelligible rules, till there is absolutely no room left to hold any of the simple truths of honor and duty and morality, which former generations deemed more important than all the learning of the books. There is just one thing that is ever held before them—that one man is as good as another, if not a little better, and that every boy among them may expect to become President of the United States, and every girl the richest lady in the land. The result is that they leave school utterly ignorant of all that is most essential for them to know. And, outside of the schools, there is no provision for their learning anything.”

WILLIAM A. HAMMOND.